

Seamlessness Policy Group American Diploma Project Issues

Background

The American Diploma Project is sponsored by the National Alliance of Business, The Education Trust, Achieve, Inc., and the Fordham Foundation. Kentucky was one of five states selected to pilot the possible use of high school assessment data by postsecondary institutions in their admissions and placement decisions and by employers in their hiring decisions. The goal of the project is to make the high school diploma more meaningful to students, postsecondary institutions, and employers alike by securing an agreement to use high school accountability measures in admissions, placement, and hiring decisions. By establishing the changes that need to be made to high school standards in order to obtain this agreement, states will be assured that they have set the bar for high school graduation in reading, writing, and mathematics at the right level.

As part of the project, the Council staff worked with the chief academic officers of Kentucky's postsecondary institutions over the past year to assemble faculty in mathematics, math-related fields, and the humanities to establish benchmarks of college and workplace readiness in mathematics and language arts. The ADP sponsors directed a review in each participating state of the assessments that high school students and college freshmen undergo and organized a comparative analysis of the skills that postsecondary faculty believe are necessary for college success with what is actually taught and tested in high school. The ADP sponsors also examined the secondary school course-taking patterns of workers in highly skilled and mid-level jobs to determine the kind of secondary curriculum, based on actual workplace expectations, that is most likely to prepare students for successful employment in a knowledge-based economy. A third component of the ADP was a study of the legal implications of using high school accountability measures for advising, placement, and hiring purposes. The research phase of the project was completed this year.

In March, the ADP brought representatives of K-12, postsecondary education, adult education, business, labor, and government to the P-16 Council to review ADP recommendations and to define policy changes that the P-16 Council should take to its constituent boards to ensure high school students are prepared for college and the workplace. Staff from the Kentucky Department of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education and representatives from local P-16 councils drew up a state plan based on the policy panel review. The plan was endorsed by the P-16 Council in June, reviewed by the Kentucky Board of Education in June, and approved by the Council on Postsecondary Education in July. The KBE agreed to wait until the benchmarks for college and workplace readiness are released nationally before considering making changes to Kentucky's high school standards. The benchmarks will be unveiled nationally at a meeting in Washington, D.C., in late January.

What the Council Can Do

- If the KBE does not agree to adopt the ADP benchmarks or modify its accountability system for use by postsecondary institutions and employers in admissions, placement, and hiring decisions, the CPE can still:
 - Work with public postsecondary institutions (and possibly the independents and flagship business/labor organizations) to declare the ADP benchmarks represent “college readiness,” whereby any student admitted to college who is able to demonstrate competence in these skills will be placed into credit-bearing coursework. This would create a clear statewide standard and reduce the need for remediation in college.
 - Work with local P-16 councils to pilot use of the writing portfolio, modified according to ADP benchmark standards, for use in admission and placement decisions.
 - Revise the adult education curriculum and professional development of adult education teachers to reflect the ADP benchmarks.
 - Develop a pre-college curriculum that reflects (in mathematics and language arts) the ADP benchmarks. Creation of a “default” high school curriculum meeting college and workplace expectations (reflected in the ADP benchmarks) may be framed as an equal educational opportunity issue for students traditionally “guided away” from college preparatory coursework.

What the Council Can Do in Partnership with Other Agencies

- Ideally, the Board of Education will agree to adopt the ADP benchmarks and revise its Core Content for Assessment (standards tested by CATS) and Program of Studies (minimum High School Graduation Requirements) accordingly. The Department has already agreed to consolidate the latter two documents, which are not in agreement. Adoption of the ADP benchmarks is an issue the Council could take up with the KBE at its February joint meeting.
- Also, ideally, the K-12 assessment system would be modified to account for student-level learning. Currently the system evaluates schools not individual students. Timing of the assessment would be modified so that they could be used as part of the postsecondary admissions and placement process. Modification of CATS may be an issue the Council wishes to discuss with the KBE at its February joint meeting.

Background Resources

1. American Diploma Program Web Site: <http://www.americandiplomaproject.org/>
2. Alice Johnson Cain, “Is It Time for the Adult Education System to Change Its Goal from High School Equivalency to College Readiness?” in *Focus on Policy*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, April 2003: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fop/2003/time.html>